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A
POETICAL ESSAY,
ON THE
EXISTENCE
OF
G O D.
P A R T I.

BY THE REV. W. H. ROBERTS,
FELLOW OF ETON COLLEGE.

Πισεύσαι γὰρ δεῖ τὸν προσερχόμενον τῷ Θεῷ, ὅτι ἔστι.

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M.DCC.LXXI.

A
POLITICAL ESSAY
ON THE
EXISTENCE
OF
GOOD

PART I
By the Rev. W. H. ROBERTS,
FELLOW OF ETON COLLEGE.

It is now printed by order of the
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TO
THE REVEREND
EDWARD BARNARD, D.D.

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY,

PROVOST OF ETON-COLLEGE,

AND

CANON OF WINDSOR,

THIS POETICAL ESSAY,

ON THE

EXISTENCE OF GOD,

AS A TESTIMONY OF GRATITUDE AND ESTEEM,

IS INSCRIBED,

BY HIS MOST OBLIGED,

AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,

WILLIAM HAYWARD ROBERTS.

A R G U M E N T OF THE FIRST PART.

General invocation—First Proof of the Existence of God, drawn from the Creation of the World—The Aristotelian system of the World's Eternity, an objection to that proof—That system stated—and refuted—1st, From the lateness of History, Arts, Sciences, &c.—2dly, From the imperfect state of Geography—3dly, From the little alteration that is visible in those objects, which are subject to corruption and decay.—Second Proof of God's Existence drawn from the impossibility of any thing making itself—which introduces the Epicurean system—Epicurus's objections to the Wisdom of God in the Creation stated—and refuted.—Third Proof of the Existence of God drawn from the force of Conscience—An Apostrophe to Conscience.—Fourth Proof of the Existence of a God drawn from universal Consent—instanced in Pagans—Mahometans—Christians—A Prayer for the Universality of the Christian Religion.

PART

P A R T I*.
ON THE
E X I S T E N C E
O F
G O D.

O THOU, who shined in beams of purest light,
Encircled by the bright Angelic host,
Thy Ministers, survey'ft whatever is
In earth, in highest heaven, Thee I approach
With awful reverence trembling: toward thy seat
I stretch my dazzled eye, if thence a ray
Haply may dart across my mortal Spirit,

* It was not the intention of the Author, either in this or the two following Parts, (one of which is on the Attributes, the other on the Providence, of God,) to introduce all the arguments, which have so frequently and forcibly been made use of on these subjects; but only to select those which seemed most adapted to a work of this nature.

And

* And touch my lips with fire. Then shall the Muse
 Disdain all humbler themes; and soaring far
 Above the vapours of this earthly sphere,
 Sound an Arch-angel's trumpet, and proclaim,
 ' I AM, who was, and is, and is to come.'
 Sceptic, if never yet thine eye survey'd
 Yon bright empyreal; if thy mind ne'er rov'd
 O'er Æther's spacious plains; look up, and tell
 From what exhaustless stream the Lord of Day
 Drinks never-wasting fire; what hidden power
 Wheels the bright planets round their central orb?
 Who bids the silent moon with sober pace
 Steal o'er the serene azure; and with stars
 Spangles the vault of night? Who told the clouds
 To drop rich moisture on the thirsty soil?
 Who shap'd the lightning's nimble wing, and rais'd
 The thunder's awful voice?—At thy command,

* Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand
 —and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, This hath touched thy lips—

ISAIAH vi. 6, 7.

Great

Great Architect, at thy creative word,
 Up from the vast and shapeless chaos rose
 Harmonious Order. Thee, Thee, mighty Lord,
 Even to the center of the formless void
 Confusion heard; and, with her thousand tongues,
 'At thy strong bidding,' Discord sunk to rest.

'Twas then, then first, from Night's ungenial womb,
 With all her hills, her vales, and sounding floods,
 This goodly Planet sprung: then first the earth
 Smiled with delicious verdure; fruit and flower
 Scatter'd fresh odours thro' the fragrant air;
 The vast deep roar'd; and on the mountain's brow
 The waving forest rear'd his stately head.

Or shall we rather say, this antient globe,
 An emanation, which the Eternal Mind
 By Fate, not Freedom, from his essence shed,
 With Him coæval, and with Him to endure,
 Runs on a ceaseless round? — Such was the tale,
 That in Lycæum, by the hallow'd grove
 Of Academe, the subtle Stagyrice

Told his admiring tribe ; and drew their minds
 From the First Good, First Perfect, and First Fair,
 To idle dreams of vain philosophy.
 Dreams, which nor haunted on Hydaspes' bank
 The frantic Brachman ; nor Phœnician seers
 Vers'd in high pedigree, and antient lore ;
 Nor Memphian, tho' the wonder-working Priest
 In mystic symbols 'grav'd on many a stone
 Her fabulous annals. Let proud Pekin's sons
 Trace her dark records thro' a thousand kings ;
 But shall that haughty empire date her birth
 Ere Time his course began ?—Go, ask of Earth,
 Have thy steep hills *for ever* pierc'd the skies ?
 Ask of the Deep, if since his howling waves
 Dash'd the rough rock, *eternal* years have roll'd ?
 Enquire, if *Everlasting* be his name ?

* Where, if this globe's *eternal*, where are all
 Her Kings, her Patriots ? Where, alas ! are all
 Her antient monuments of arts, and arms,

* Lucrētius, Lib. v.

And tales of bleeding heroes? Shall we say,
 Till Nimrod led his mighty bands to war,
 That never Chief had hurl'd the pointed lance,
 Or drove the winged car? Did never Bard,
 Till Amram's son pour'd forth his raptur'd strains,
 Record past actions of the brave, and wise?
 Why unessay'd the deep, till toward her shore
 Astonish'd Greece saw daring Cadmus spread
 His swelling sails, and from the Tyrian main
 Bring peace and science to her savage sons?
 Why did no sage explain, how the white ray,
 Refracted by dioptric glass, displays
 Hues indistinct before, till Newton came,
 Pride of Britannia's isle? Why flow'd the blood
 Unknown, till Hervey thro' the united veins
 Traced back its genial current to the heart,

Hark, how the heroes of imperial Rome
 Boast their wide empire's universal sway!
 To distant climes her conquering eagles flew,
 To Calpe's hills, to Thule's utmost shore,

B

And

And Ganges, farthest Oriental stream,
 Where rose the morn. But ah! in evil hour
 She found what multitudes, who ne'er had felt
 Her galling chain, were hid in regions dark
 Of ice and frost; till from their barren caves
 The populous North drove all her warrior clans:
 From Weser, and from Elbe, to Anio's bank,
 And Tiber's frightened stream?—Have we forgot,
 How, strange to tell, the wondering mariner,
 Far in the bosom of the Western deep
 Found worlds unknown before; and from the top
 Of Andes, saw the Amazonian stream
 Swoln by the tribute of expanded lakes,
 Rivers, and cataracts, thro' forests wild
 Pour his broad floods, and in his rapid course
 Visit a thousand tribes?—And shall we call
 That world *eternal*, whose undaunted sons
 Ne'er circled half her orb? or can we deem
 That *everlasting* ages could have roll'd,
 Ere some uncheck'd adventurer had defied

The Hesperian foam, and to his hardy crew
 Shewn the rich tribute of Potosi's mines?—
 Even yet much rests unknown. The day will come,
 When some sad ship shall roam the Southern main,
 With sails, and ensigns torn; and in the wide
 Expanse of roaring waters, far beyond
 Where the sun turns to visit Northern climes,
 Braced by the Antarctic circle shall descry
 Some mighty continent. The ambitious Thrones
 Of distant Europe 'cross the line shall send
 Their thronging colonies, and disturb the rest
 Of peaceful nations. Thee, Iberia, thee,
 And thy false faith, some dying Motezume
 Again shall curse, and, with his life, resign
 His wrested sceptre to a stranger's hand.

Besides, that's not *eternal*, which tho' chance
 Can alter, time corrupt, or force destroy,
 Yet still remains, and fills the curious mind
 With proofs of late Creation. See what rocks,

What mountains rise, that cast their evening shade
 Far o'er the plain beneath : tho' part the wind
 Sweep with its wings away ; tho' earthquakes tear
 Their yawning cliffs ; tho' Time from year to year
 Working with stealthy, and invifible hand,
 Moulder their crumbling fides, they bend not yet
 Their fummits to the vale. With all his fnows
 Stands Teneriff ; and Athos ftill o'erhangs
 The Ægean, ftudded thick with fhining ifles,
 Cyclad and Sporad. If thofe lofty hills
 Knew no beginning, tho' ten thousand years
 But one fmall grain impair'd, their names, their place,
 Had long been loft ; beneath the infatiate waves
 Each atom wafh'd away ; * like that fam'd ifle
 Fancied of antient fabulifts, that with all
 Her tower-crown'd cities, palaces, and fanes,
 Sunk in the bofom of the Atlantic deep.

Whatever is, hear Reafon's voice, was made,
 Or increate. If increate, 'tis God ;

* See Platô.

If made, by whom? Or was itself at once
 Maker, and work, productive, and produced?
 Vain sophistry! to some first plastic cause
 Trace then its birth, and that first cause, is God.
 For say, could matter by instinctive force
 Start into sense, and motion? Hast thou seen
 The cold dead clod wake into warmth, and life?
 Say, did old Ocean with capacious hand
 Scoop the deep channel for his humid train?
 Did the tall mountain, with unborrow'd force
 Lift his aspiring head? or did the moon
 By unimparted, and essential power,
 Mould her bright sphere, and point her silver shafts?
 Did the free Atoms, in sage council met,
 Debate where each should move? or did they float
 Thro' tracts of endless space, 'till Chance contrived
 This Order, 'till from universal strife
 This universal harmony began?
 Who, that on some deserted coast beheld
 A stately pile with antique frieze adorn'd,

Ionic,

Ionic, or Corinthian, who would say
 That storms had torn it from the mountain's side:
 With all its towers; or think the boisterous wind
 Haply had fix'd it on its solid base?
 Who, but would rather deem that painful art,
 Tho' now a stranger to this silent shore,
 Had polish'd every column, every dome,
 The moulded architrave, and fretted roof?

But who is He, that round yon garden bends
 His steps, and with presumptuous tongue arraigns
 Jehova's works?—I know his hoary hairs;
 The Sage of Pleasure: with the sons of Greece
 I mix, and listen to his impious tale.

* ' Think not a hand divine could form that globe,
 ' Where scarce a trace of Wisdom may be seen,
 ' Of Goodness, or of Power. For part the sun
 ' With direct rays, and fire intense, denies
 ' To human use; or dark Cimmerian frost
 ' Has hid from mortal habitant: and part

* See Lucretius, B. 5.

' Vast

• Vast lakes, huge rocks, rough thorns, and barren sands
 • O'erspread; 'till man with patient care reform
 • The stubborn earth, and tame the ungenial soil.
 • Yet then, even then, when all his hopes are high,
 • When ripening fruits expect the reaper's scythe,
 • Oft he bewails the scorching heat; or weeps
 • To see the summer's angry storm descend,
 • And years of labour in a moment lost.

• What mean those ministers of vengeance; Gout,
 • And racking Stone, and Fever's raging fire?
 • Why shakes the South contagion from his wings;
 • While Death, grim tyrant, with unerring hand
 • Directs his dart unseen?—On the bare ground,
 • Like the poor shipwreck'd mariner, whom storms
 • Have cast on some inhospitable shore,
 • The new-born infant lies; thro' many a moon,
 • Helpless and weak, he wails his bitter lot,
 • And each sad hour beholds his artless tear.
 • Not so the tenant of the field: he quits
 • His parent's side, and wantons o'er the lawn

• Rejoicing:

‘ Rejoicing : Earth for him spontaneous spreads
 ‘ Ambrosial banquets ; and for him the brook
 ‘ Winds thro’ sequester’d vales his amber stream.’

Fool, wast thou present, when the Almighty sunk
 Earth’s deep foundations, and to Ocean said,
 ‘ Here thy proud Waves be staid ;’ when first the Stars
 Chaunted their matin song, and Angels cried
 ‘ Hosanna to the Highest ?’—Thou wast not there ;
 But WISDOM was.—Ere yet the earth was made,
 Ere yet the mountains were brought forth, or ere
 The day-spring knew his place, at God’s right hand
 She sat, his chief delight. She sat, and saw
 His spirit moving o’er the watry deep ;
 Saw genial light, obedient to his call,
 Spring from the womb of darkness ; she beheld
 The ground yield grass and herb, yield fruit and flower,
 And Man, imperial Man, the Lord of All,
 Rise from the dust. She saw that all was good,
 And with her voice divine stamp’d every work.

Think’st thou the zone, that girds the torrid soil,

Untrod

Untrod by human step? The Pilot, born
 Far from the Sun's mæandring path, defies
 The burning equinoctial: to the woods
 Of hot Bornéo, to Guiana's shore,
 He steers his prow undaunted. Oft within
 The frozen circle of the Arctic pole,
 He moors his vessel on some Northern isle,
 Greenland, or Zembla. There the shivering hinds
 O'er their bleak mountains roam; nor wish to change
 Their darkling twilight, and ungenial frost,
 For brighter sunshine, or for milder skies.

What tho' with thorns and sand the earth be spread?
 Say, would'st thou banish painful industry?
 Say, would'st thou wish, with folded hands supine,
 Like thine own Gods to sit, and doze away
 A life of senseless ease?—What tho' the storm
 Oft blasts the planter's hope? drives not that storm
 From the purg'd air the putrid Pestilence,
 Stalking thro' noon-day's heat? What tho' disease
 Infect the feeble frame? yet hence arise

C

Cool

Cool thought, repentance, hence contempt of life,
And eager hope, that springs beyond the grave.

Is Death an evil? Tell me, would'st thou drag
A lingering dotage of eternal pain,
And, thro' successive generations, shake
Thy hoary hairs, unhonour'd?—Would'st thou wish
To fall, ere Reason be matur'd by time;
Ere each fair object, that around thee shines,
Strike thy rapt soul with wonder?—Think not then
That Man should ripen, as the beast, that soon
Arrives at perfect growth, and soon decays;
Nor judge from *Parts* unknown, this wond'rous *Whole*.

Thus Heaven, and Earth, declare their Maker's praise:
Nor these alone; but in the human breast
A faithful monitor the Almighty placed,
A witness of Himself.

Come then, the scene
Of frantic mirth is o'er: the social bowl,
The midnight frolic, and the scornful jest,
Are gone; thy youth is past, thy strength decay'd,

And

And all the partners of thy wanton hours
 Are sunk in shame, and sorrow, to the grave,
 Come, tell me, did a self-convicted soul
 Ne'er check thy guilty joys? Did that blest Spirit
 Who o'er the sinner's penitent mind distils
 His precious balm, ne'er interrupt thy peace,
 'Mid the rude sallies of unholy mirth,
 And impure passion? nor the still small voice
 Of Conscience, make the hour of solitude
 To thee more hideous, than the silent watch
 Of midnight to the sleepless eye of pain,
 Or pining care?—O Conscience, heavenly guide,
 Thou, 'mid the storms, and tempests of the world,
 'Mid the rude blasts of chilling penury,
 In tears of woe, in death's alarming hour,
 Spread'st round the good man's couch thy sheltering wing,
 And all is peace: But Oh! how sharp the pang,
 When in the sinner's agonizing heart
 Thou piercest deep, and driv'st the guilty wretch
 Far from the confines of tumultuous joy

To scenes of melancholy, and black despair!
 But whence these boding doubts? Why shrinks the soul
 From future ill? If no superior Power
 Claims homage, why do fancied evils scare
 The heart of Wisdom, that to crafty tales
 Ne'er yielded tame submission?—Gracious Lord,
 'Tis Thou, that in the sinner's breast dost move
 With kindliest influence; 'tis thy tender rod
 That heals his soul with medicinal wounds:
 The voice of Conscience is the voice of God.

Thee, universal King *, thy peopled earth,
 Thro' every region, every tribe, adores.
 And tho' rude Ignorance, with barbarous rites,
 And uncouth gestures, howls her hymn of praise;
 Tho' senseless Idols, or created Lights
 Of Heaven usurp thine homage; yet to Thee
 Their voice is rais'd; to Thee their incense smokes;
 To Thee in grove and vale their temples rise.

* Nulla gens usquam est, adeo contra leges moresque projecta, ut non aliquos Deos credat.

With

With feathery crown, and flaming gems adorn'd,
 The gaudy Mexican from cups of gold
 Pours out the captive Warrior's reeking blood:
 At Vitzipultzi's shrine; while, with loud shouts,
 In mystic maze the Virgins of the Sun
 Dance round the bleeding victim. Near the banks
 Of Zaara, whence the Merchant, dreadful trade!
 Comes fraught with slavery to Caribbean isles,
 The tawny African o'er Ocean's stream
 Spreads forth his arms; on bended knee implores
 The howling *winds*; and begs the *storm* to drive
 The cruel Christian far from Congo's coast.

Where Esperanza to the Indian main
 Extends its rocks, the filthy native bows
 With humblest reverence to the *Moon*: From her
 He asks ripe fruits, and fertile seasons mild;
 And ever as she swells the impetuous tide,
 With antic dances, and rude carol, greets
 Her rising beams. On rich Golconda's walls
 Ten tedious nights, and ten long sleepless days,

The

The self-tormented Bramin fits: if FO
 Well-pleas'd behold his pain, it recks not him
 That torn with hooks of steel his mangled flesh
 Pours streams of blood, or from his burning head
 With livid light the spiral flames ascend.

See, where the turban'd Caliph o'er the fields
 Of fertile Syria spreads wide-wasting war,
 And famine: nor can groves of ravag'd palm,
 Olives and figs, nor desolated vines
 That crown'd the brink of Pharphar, lucid stream,
 Nor widow's piercing shriek, nor orphan's tear,
 Melt his obdurate soul: for not the lust
 Of frantic power, or empire unconfin'd,
 But burning zeal, and hope of future bliss,
 Arm him with tenfold fury. On he goes
 Till vanquish'd millions glut his righteous rage;
 Then pours to Mahomet a fervent prayer,
 While Victory washes from her savage hands
 The blood of slaughter'd hosts.

These, mighty Lord,

These

These all thy *Being*, and thy *Power* adore,
 Thy *Name* unknown. Not so in those blest climes,
 Where thy dear Son has rear'd his Cross. For us
 He left the regions of eternal Day;
 While all the host of Angels carol'd round
 'Glory to God on high.' From East to West,
 Swift as a Sun-beam darts, the tidings flew
 Of covenanted Salvation. Scepter'd Kings
 In vain conspir'd to check its rapid course,
 And Persecution drew her flaming sword:
 Thy Word, great God, prevail'd.—O may it soon
 O'er unenlighten'd realms its beams diffuse!
 Then, to his long-lamented home restor'd,
 The wand'ring Hebrew shall rebuild the walls
 Of sacred Salem, and on Calvary's top
 Adore his suffering Lord. The feast of Love,
 The banquet of remembrance dear, shall rise
 In wild Savannas, and 'mid boundless woods.
 Then the fierce Arab, that now prowls for prey

O'er

O'er scorching sands, shall drink the cup of life;
Purg'd in Baptismal streams; and every tribe
Of savage Indians, in the house of prayer
Kneel with meek faith, and shew *Thy Kingdom come.*

While all the host of Angels round
Glory to God on high, From East to West,
Swift as a sun-beam dart, the tidings flew
Of covenanted Salvation. Scatter'd Kings
In vain conspir'd to check its rapid course,
And Persecution drew her flaming sword:
Thy Word, great God, prevail'd—O may it soon
O'er unlighten'd realms its beams diffuse!
Then, to his long-lamented home restor'd,
The wandering Hebrew shall rebuild the walls
Of sacred Salem, and on Calvary's top
Adore his suffering Lord. The sea of Love
The banner of remembrance bear, shall to
In wild savannas, and mid boundless woods,
Then the fierce Arab, that now prowls for prey